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How far to the 'right' is Ronald Reagan?

MY sense of where President Reagan stands in the political spectrum has been adjusted. I went to a lecture the other day where Irving Kristol was defining a "conservative" foreign policy.

Irving Kristol has been called "the godfather of the neoconservative family." He is a person of impressive literary credentials. Originally he was on the political left. One of his more interesting activities was as the co-founder and co-editor of *Encounter*, a magazine once prominent as articulator of the anti-communist left.

Encounter died after word surfaced in Washington that it had been long subsidized by the CIA. Mr. Kristol has at other times edited *Commentary*, *The Reporter*, and *The Public Interest*.

I knew when I went to hear him talk on foreign policy that he had moved to the right since his early days in magazine journalism. I had not realized how far right.

One of his proposals was that the United States should get out of NATO, abandon Western Europe, and let it fend for itself. He would also scrap the United Nations and untangle the US from all foreign commitments, except for Israel, then proceed along a course

of action aimed at bringing down the present regime in the Soviet Union.

He named Angola, Afghanistan, Cuba, and Nicaragua as places where the US should proceed to impose upon the Soviet Union such defeats in foreign policy as would "shake the Soviet regime" and undermine its legitimacy.

Richard Pipes, a Harvard historian with similar views about the Soviet Union, recently contended that the Soviet regime "is legitimated only by its successes in foreign policy" and "the notion of invincibility." The Kristol-Pipes group claims that if the Soviets suffered even "small defeats" in foreign policy, "they would immediately suffer domestic consequences."

I would call it neo-isolationism wedded to an operational "rollback" policy. But neoconservatives call it neoconservatism.

To listen to Mr. Kristol expound this doctrine is to realize that Mr. Reagan is

a long way from being or practicing what the neoconservatives would recognize as a "conservative" foreign policy.

The American President has just come home from talking and even dining with the leader of the Soviet regime in Geneva. Their respective wives were present at these convivial occasions. Mr. Reagan has taken no step to liquidate either the UN or the NATO alliance. On the contrary, he has himself recently spoken at the UN in explanation of his policies, and he is in constant and close touch with his NATO allies.

Add that right now Mr. Reagan is having a difficulty (over spying) with the only foreign country Mr. Kristol wants for a foreign associate and ally.

Among my journalistic colleagues are some who think the President is pursuing a hard-line foreign policy. It may sometimes look "hard" and adventurous to those whose sense of the meanings of such words as hawk and dove were formed in the days of Jimmy Carter or John F. Kennedy. But looking at US foreign policy from the perspective of the neoconservatives makes President Reagan look like the gentlest of doves. They have not yet publicly (so far as I know) called him an appeaser. But they come close to it at times.

The neoconservatives were among the early supporters of the Reagan presidential candidacy. They are represented prominently within the administration. They push their views daily on the President.

Having listened to Mr. Kristol present his doctrine in detail, I can no longer be surprised when Mr. Reagan again asks Congress for money to help the "contras" in Nicaragua or hints at the possibility of giving at least covert aid to Jonas Savimbi in Angola. In the community in which he lives this is the least he can do and still cling to the outer fringes of deserving to be called a "conservative."

If he wanted to win the full approval of his true-blue right-wing supporters he would send the Marines to Nicaragua tomorrow, give Jonas Savimbi all the guns he could use, and prepare to invade Cuba. It would make for a lively time in world affairs.